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SUBJECT: MARITIME PORT SECURITY

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Egyptian officials responded positively to presentations by U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) International Port Security Liaison Officer John Bowers in Cairo and Alexandria March 6 to 8, as he described the USCG plans to monitor foreign compliance with International Maritime Organization (IMO) port security standards per the U.S. Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA). In introductory meetings with the Minister of Transportation and the Head of the Maritime Transport Section (MTS), Bowers described the respective roles of USCG Liaison Officers and USCG International Port Security (Port Visit) Teams and emphasized U.S. willingness to work closely with the GOE on a bilateral exchange of information on port security. End summary.

2. (U) On March 6, LCDR John Bowers, USCG International Security Liaison Officer and EconOff met with Minister of Transportation Dr. Essam Sharaf and the Egyptian Head of the Maritime Transport Sector Rear Admiral Sherin to describe new USCG initiatives in international maritime port security. Bowers is based at the USCG Activities Europe office in Rotterdam and has regional responsibilities for several countries, including Egypt. Bowers described how the MTSA now requires the U.S. Coast Guard to assess the effectiveness of anti-terrorism measures in foreign ports with vessels destined for U.S. ports in accordance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS). The USCG accomplishes this review through a combination of liaison officers stationed abroad and International Port Security (IPS) visit teams stationed in Washington.

3. (U) Bowers emphasized that the ISPS code allows countries some latitude in identifying specific methods of compliance with the code. The USCG recognizes that the host government is best suited to determine the methods and regulations needed to accomplish compliance. Due to the myriad methods of compliance with the ISPS, he stressed that any visit to a port by an IPS visit team should be considered an opportunity for a "bilateral exchange of information" rather than a port "assessment." The USCG IPS visit team will not perform port visits without an invitation from the host government.

4. (SBU) Minister Sharaf reiterated the GOE's commitment to the ISPS as part of its transportation security and anti-terrorism efforts. He gave assurances that the IPS visit team would be welcomed and made a point to state, with Admiral Sherin present, that the team would receive full cooperation. Consistent with the bilateral exchange of information, the Minister expressed interest in hearing from the IPS visit team how other countries with similar port characteristics addressed security issues and also expressed interest in the possibility of a reciprocal port visit.

5. (SBU) Bowers discussed the program more extensively in subsequent meetings with Rear Admiral Sherin, members of his port security staff and representatives of the Regional Maritime Security Institute and Sokhna Port. During those discussions Bowers reiterated the USCG's interest in receiving an invitation for an IPS visit team in April as had been specified in a USCG letter to Admiral Sherin dated 11 FEB 2005. Rear Admiral Sherin responded that he planned to write a response but April would be "unpalatable." The Egyptian Maritime Transportation Sector (MTS) wanted to have more time to discuss security processes through its inter-agency National Maritime Port Security Committee (NMPSC) and Sherin expressed interest in performing a reciprocal visit prior to the USCG IPS visit team arriving in Egypt. Bowers responded that a delay was workable, but that an open ended delay was also "unpalatable". Access to foreign ports is important for the USCG to determine whether a country is compliant or non-compliant with the ISPS code. Vessels of any flag traveling from ports in non-compliant countries are considered to be higher security risks. Before permitting such vessels to enter U.S. ports, the Coast Guard will require precautionary security measures for these vessels that will likely delay their entry.

6. (SBU) Admiral Sherin acknowledged that Egypt had not reported all of its international ports to the IMO, but that efforts are being made by MTS to accurately identify and list all of the relevant ports.

17. (SBU) Bowers, visit also opened the door for re-establishing contact and increasing interaction between the Egyptian MTS and the Economic section of the Embassy.

18. (SBU) Comment: Bowers, visit was a successful and necessary first step in preparing the way for ISPS related port visits in Egypt. Although the GOE welcomed cooperation and bilateral discussions on port security, port teams should consider sovereignty sensitivities and the affect of increased security on trade during visits. End comment.

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